

14. All the worshippers of Isis support Cn. Helvius Sabinus for *aedilis*.
15. the perfumers support Postumius proculus for *aedilis*.
16. All the carpenters support Cuspius Pansa for *aedilis*.
17. All the Pompeians elected P. Paquius Proculus *duovir iure dicundo*.
18. Ball-players, do this: we ask that you elect A. Vettius Firmus *aedilis*. He is worthy of the republic.
19. I ask that you elect G. Gavius Rufus *duovir*. He is useful to the republic. I, Vesonius primus, ask this.
20. the Garlic dealers support Gn. Helvius Sabinus for *aedilis*.
21. M. Pupius rufus for *duovir iure dicundo*. Mustius the dry-cleaner made (this notice) and whitened the space. He wrote it, alone, without the rest of his comrades.
22. I ask that you elect L. Rusticelius Celer *duovir iure dicundo* for the second time. He is worthy of the republic.
23. Statia and Petronia ask you to support M. Casellius and L. Albuncius for *aediles*. May there be such citizens in our community forever!
24. Genialis supports Bruttius Balbus for *duovir*. This man will save the treasury!
25. The neighbors ask that you elect L. Statius Receptus *duovir iure dicundo*. He is worthy. Aemilius Celer, his neighbor, wrote this. Whoever defaces this notice out of envy, may you get sick!
26. Cuspius for aedile. If glory should be given truly to any living man, a worthy glory ought to be given to this young man.
27. L. Popidius Ampliatus, son of Lucius, for *aedilis*. Montanus, his crony, supports him, together with the chess players.
28. Maria supports Gn. Helvius Sabinus for *aedilis*.

HOW A ROMAN ASSEMBLY WORKED

by Gregory A. Staley

ROMAN ASSEMBLIES

Just as we have both a Senate and a House of Representatives, so too did the Romans have more than one political assembly. Unlike our assemblies, however, the Roman *comitia* were not composed of selected representatives of the citizens but contained in theory the entire body of citizens. What made the various Roman *comitia* different from one another was the way in which these citizens were divided into groups: by

geographical location, by family connections, or by social and financial status. Each of these assemblies had different functions. We will focus our attention on the *Comitia Centuriata*, the assembly which elected magistrates.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE *COMITIA CENTURIATA*

The *Comitia Centuriata* had its origin in the army, which was probably the earliest assembly of citizens. In fact, the very definition of "citizen" was someone who could serve in the army. Hence citizens were only males over the age of eighteen. The army was originally divided into groups of one hundred men or "centuries" – hence the name *Comitia Centuriata* (an assembly organized into centuries).

In the early days of Rome, soldiers were expected to supply their own weapons, yet not every citizen could contribute equally. Those who had the resources could afford a horse with all its trappings, and so they were in the cavalry. Everyone else was a foot-soldier; but even here financial status determined what kind of weapons a citizen could furnish. Hence, the infantry was divided into five classes, the first being the wealthiest, and fifth being the poorest.

Thus, the army and the assembly which evolved from it were organized on the basis of wealth. When this assembly was used to elect officials, each century had one vote. But "centuries" ceased to mean "one hundred men." The centuries in the higher property classes generally had small numbers in them; those in the lower property classes had much larger numbers. Consequently, a wealthy man's vote counted for more than a poor man's. For example a century of fifty rich men had the same single vote of a century of five hundred poorer men.

"One man-one vote" was not a political ideal in which the Romans believed. Indeed, Cicero tells us clearly that a man's vote and power should be proportionate to his wealth and status:

(Servius) easque (i.e., *the classes*) ita disparavit ut suffragia non in multitudinis sed in locupletium potestate essent, curavitque, quod semper in re publica tenendum est, ne plurimum valeant plurimi.

Servius (*Servius Tullius, one of the seven kings of Rome*) divided the classes in such a way that the votes were not under the control of masses but under the control of the rich. And he saw to it that the majority would not have the greatest power – a principle which must always be maintained in the Republic.

--*De Republica* II 39

One of the ways in which Servius Tullius gave greater power to the wealthy was in the number of centuries he assigned to each property class:

CAVALRY

23 centuries

INFANTRY

Class I	80 centuries
Class II	20 centuries
Class III	20 centuries
Class IV	20 centuries
Class V	30 centuries

TOTAL: 193 Centuries

Out of a total of 193 centuries, the two highest property class contained 103. Not only was this far out of proportion to their population numbers; it was also more than enough to assure a majority in any election.

From this brief description, we can see a number of important ways in which Roman democracy was different from our own:

1. The right to vote was not available to everyone but was limited to those who could contribute to the defense of the state.
2. The vote belonged not to each individual but to the group of which he was a member.
3. Because the numbers in each group were not the same, even though each group had the same one vote, and because there were more groups among the wealthy than among the poor, each citizen's vote did not carry the same weight. The wealthy wielded more power than the poor.
4. The Romans stopped an election as soon as any candidate had one a majority. Since the two highest property classes had enough centuries to comprise a majority and since they voted first, the election often stopped after they had cast their votes. The lower classes did not then have the opportunity even to express their opinion.

HOW TO CONDUCT A MOCK ROMAN ELECTION

Obviously, the typical Latin class does not have enough students to form 193 divisions or "centuries," as did the Roman *Comitia Centuriata*. Nonetheless, it is possible³ for a class to conduct an election in a way which will illustrate the differences between Roman elections and our own. To do this, two things are necessary:

1. There need be more groups in the two highest property classifications than there are in the four lower ones taken together.
2. There should be more students in each group assigned to the four lower classes than there are in the groups assigned to the two highest classes.

The following chart illustrates how these conditions could be met in a class of anywhere between 24 and 32 or more students. The class would be divided into ten centuries; each century in the two highest classes would contain two students. Those in the lower classes would each contain three or more:

CAVALRY 2 centuries (2 students per century)

INFANTRY

Class I	4 centuries (2 students per century)
Class II	1 century (3-5+ students per century)
Class III	"
Class IV	"
Class V	"

TOTAL: 10 centuries (24-32+ students)

A majority of six centuries would be needed to elect any candidate to office.

HOW THE ROMANS VOTED

Each century had one vote, and that vote was determined by a majority of the members in the century. During an election, all centuries voted simultaneously to determine which candidate each would support. They did so in the following way. Each voter scratched the name of the candidate for whom he was voting on a wax tablet. The voter then crossed a narrow bridge called the *pons* (designed to prevent any soliciting of votes while the voter was casting his ballot; the bridge was made narrow so that solicitors could not stand on the side while the voters passed) and deposited his vote in a jar called a *cista*. This process is illustrated in the Roman coin reproduced below:



With permission: http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/votingcoin_drawing.jpg

After the whole century had voted in this way, the jar was taken to another place where appointed officials, called *custodes*, counted the results.

THE RENUNTIATIO

The Romans called the official declaration of an election's results the *renuntiatio*. The presiding magistrate called on each century, starting with the centuries in the Cavalry, and asked for the name of the candidate elected in that century. In your class, you can do the same. As your presiding magistrate calls on each century, an appointed member of that century will announce its choice. A record of the votes should be kept; and as soon as any one candidate receives a majority of the votes, the election should stop. The Romans

saw no point in asking for the votes of the other centuries when their opinions could have no effect on the outcome.

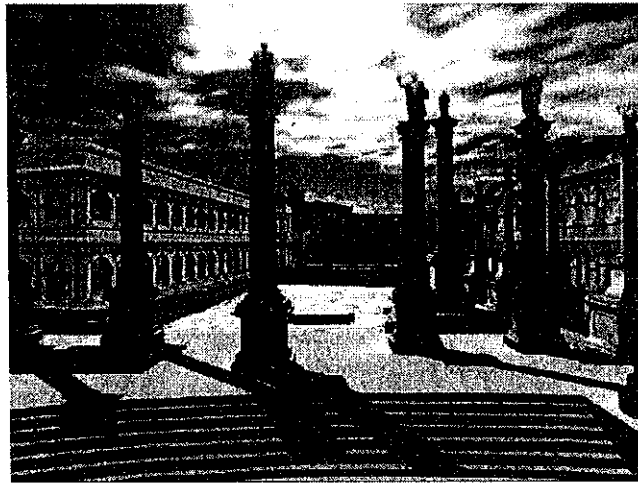
ADDITIONAL READINGS

The information in this lesson was drawn from the following sources. Teachers may wish to refer to these books for additional information.

E. S. Staveland, *Greek and Roman Voting and Elections*

Lily Ross Taylor, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar*

F. R. Cowell, *Cicero and the Roman Republic*



With permission: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/images/2007/06/070611092847-large.jpg>

Questions to answer:

1. Identify the qualities of a Roman citizen. How do these qualifications reflect the essential characteristics of Roman society?
2. How does the system of voting in Rome differ from our expectations on voting today? Please identify and explain at least **two** key differences.
3. How does the voting system disproportionately favor the wealthy and powerful?
4. Following your answer to #2, how would the focus of government shift, change, or be swayed by how the voting systems favor the wealthy and powerful?